

# ORX

Nasty, Brutish, and Short

by Raven Daegmorgan



Elves hate them; dwarves aren't too fond of them, either.  
The armies of Darkness use them as plentiful canon-fodder.  
Lucky for them, they breed like rabbits.

# PROPS

CREDITS

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## The Concept

### CONCEPT

**Orx** is a humorous game, a poke in the eye at tradition and establishment – after all, what better race to poke their betters in the eye than the orcs? As such, the text is written with a rather fist-in-cheek sense of humor...get used to it.

On the other hand, **Orx** can be as serious as you want it to be, I'm certainly not stopping you from making meaningful, passionate stories filled with pathos and angst and...oh wait, some other company did that already. Alright, exploration, heroism and intrigue...damn, also done before...ok, exploration, slaughter and looting...oh dear...

## Head-first into the Pig-shit

### OH CRAP!

After creating an orc by assigning dice to three different scores and adding some other details, players take turns choosing a die to roll against the gamemaster (or each other) and narrating the results of those rolls into a tale. Playing the game also requires (in fact, *demands*) a degree of out-of-character tactical thinking and even a bit of resource management.

**Orx** is a contest between players and against the gamemaster, and the ticking time-bomb of Fate. This makes **Orx** a *CSI Game*, shorthand for "Competitive Story Interaction Game", a term coined by Guy Shalev for a type of role-playing game that includes and focuses on inter-player competition. Discussion, more information, and a list of other CSI-type games can be found at <http://competitiverpgs.wordpress.com/> and <http://competitiverpgs.pbwiki.com/>

There are a few other differences that need to be covered as well before we get into the swing of things, but ultimately it's all about having fun.

## What You Need To Play

### BLOOD AND SOULS

- δ Dice: they're pointy!
- δ Pencils and paper: also pointy!
- δ A twisted sense of humor: could be pointy!
- δ An ability to count beyond three: triangles are pointy!
- δ A couple other people to poke...er, play with.

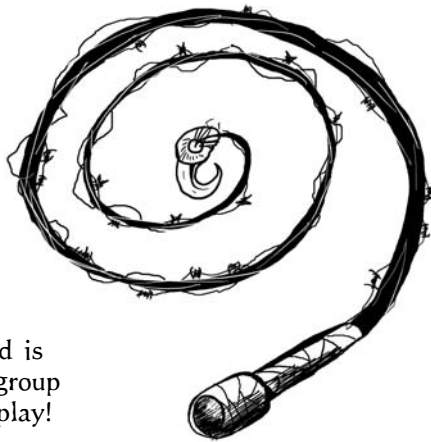
Quick & Dirty  
FOREPLAY

The best way to actually describe the play of this game is: "If **Orx** were a play, the dice would form the script to be followed by the players." That is, the dice tell you what's happening...none of this "role-playing" garbage, at least not initially. You play out what the dice tell you to play out.

*By way of example, if your orc is confronting the orc-king and attempting to convince him he deserves to be a royal guard, the player rolls his die against the orc-king's die and then plays it out, win or lose, whether he goes in cowering and sniveling or boastful and proud (and which way he ends up).*

So, rather than telling the other players that you "swing your sword at the human scumbag" and then rolling to see if you actually hit the target, in **Orx**, you roll first, and *then* you decide what it was you were even doing.

No one knows what is actually happening until *after* the dice are rolled, at which point it becomes the job of the rolling player to provide an in-game rationale for the die results. How it all turned out the way the dice rolled is up to that player and the group to explain (or not) through play!



You will note there is even more to this: since players do not usually declare a task or an action they are attempting before they roll, and the dice tell the player what the results are (win or lose) *without* actually describing the specific events leading to it, the player is the one who gets to narrate the action as they will...

*Perhaps the roll is described as a long exchange of blows with an enemy, ending with either your defeat or victory; or as the growling, gnashing conversation (and probable short, vicious melee) between the members of the orcish war band as they vie for dominance in who leads and where they go next.*

...well, almost. The chosen style of the game generally affects what is allowed, or what must be described, as do a few other variables.

A failure is a failure; you can't succeed with a roll you failed, so no smooth-talking by your orc when he fails his social roll (and, er, probably not even if he succeeds! These *are* orcs, after all!). At least you get to screw over your own orc, and you can be as vicious as you want without feeling all guilty about it.

Simply put, you play out what the dice say happens, not what you decide would be best for your orc if it happened, nor what you decide you would like to say, nor the reaction you want to express. Check your dice and describe the story.

Why? To get past that whole "ego" concept in RPGs, the "character inviolability" concept, where "your guy" is always the way you want them to be, always acts in a specific manner and never, ever does anything you don't want them to do or says anything foolish, or never gets the snot beaten out of them by a five-year old panhandling on the street corner.

Sorry, your orc is not a paper doll for your ego.

## Stuff You Should Probably Realize

### BRAINWASHING

Here's the deal, **Orx** obviously plays a little differently than most role-playing games, but it is easiest to understand if you grasp the heart-and-soul of the mechanic, which is summed up as a little jingle we like to call **Rule One**: "*Always roll the dice. No matter what.*"

Alright, it doesn't have much in the way of rhyme, and those little electronic chips that play music were too expensive for us to add to the page just to give the rule that jingle-feeling, but there it is. Keep *Rule One* in mind and you'll probably scratch your head a lot less while trying to imagine play as you read...unless you have head lice, in which case you won't (scratch less). In either case, as un-orcish as it may be, I recommend showering at least once a day.

Basically, this rule helps facilitate the roll-first, explain-later play style of **Orx**, so no one may take an action or speak in character without **FIRST ROLLING THE DICE**. Yep, there it is: **Rule One**.

Ability scores in **Orx** are measured in sides-of-dice (d4, d6, etc.), and they don't represent comparable levels of ability or skill, or any sort of concrete, scalar measurement. Rather, they measure the relative danger level of a situation or individual.

This is how you can have a dragon with an average die assigned to it...that doesn't mean the dragon's flaming breath isn't powerful, or that it is only as strong as the average human, or anything remotely similar, it just means that the thing is of average danger to the orcs in that situation.

Everything in **Orx** is measured in terms of dice, and everyone is constrained by the sizes and numbers of dice they have and can roll. Yep. There's tactics involved in play – the game will be trying to smash your orc into green jelly pulp, while your job is to keep it alive.

## Isn't Losing Usually A Bad Thing?

### LOSING

There are no heavily-detailed, round-by-round, blow-by-blow, die-by-die combats or other situations. One situation = one roll. No more, no less. Each roll is a functional overview of a situation, consisting of a short paragraph or two of description.

Likewise, there are no petty-action rolls in **Orx**. In fact, there are no specific "action" rolls at all(!) (that is, rolls where the dice determine the results of *specific* tasks like the swing of a sword, creeping silently down a hallway, or casting a spell). Sure, any of those could be a part of the narration, but rolls in **Orx** tend to be broader in scope than this.

Due to the above method (one conflict = one roll) and the game's structure, you, as a player, tend to "lose" more often, since there are no sudden mechanical turnabouts, that is, no averaging of probabilities during an attempt to resolve some situation. But **Orx** is not about winning or characters achieving their goals...it's about *orcs*, for the love of Pete!

The thing about the rules is that they are designed to lead ultimately to the orcs' defeat, or rather, their deaths. They are designed to mirror a doomed struggle against fate and eventuality. **Orx** is about seeing what you can do with what you're given, it's about humor and tragedy. Keep that in mind and you'll enjoy yourself much more than if you whine and simper about how your orc just can't get a break.

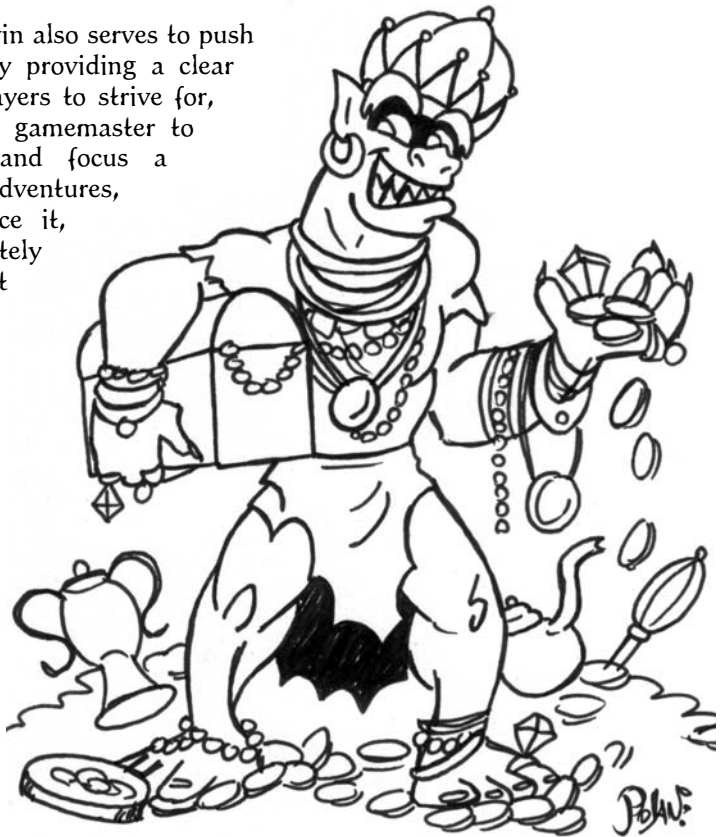
## Winning

### YOU ARE THE CHAMPION

Yeeeeeaaah, oook...no, really, what's the point? Alright, alright, you whiners! Note that in a change from the standard limp-wristed, sallow-cheeked idea of there being no winners or losers in an RPG, every session of **Orx** has a clear winner. The player whose orc has the most "Loot" at the end of a session is declared the winner! Whooh! Bragging rights until next session!

Oh, and by the way, since there are only a couple of limited ways to get Loot, the only way to win the game will be to make sacrifices, take chances, and disaffect your bosom companions through violence, backstabbing, and greedy, calculated selfishness. That's how the game is played.

The ability to win also serves to push play forward by providing a clear goal for the players to strive for, and allows the gamemaster to easily create and focus a variety of adventures, which, let's face it, are ultimately pretty much just going to be variations on the "get the widget" or "stop the monster" theme.



## Who's Running Things?

### HERE BE GAMEMASTERS

The "Dark Master" is in charge. The head honcho in charge of everything; the guy running the show; the being that pays the wages and lets you live. This Dark Master is always a human with powerful mojo, a collection of evil floating eyeballs, an ancient undead wizard, an ogre or giant or something else, but **never** an orc(!), and he or it is always followed out of fear.

Ok, so the Dark Master is the gamemaster, right? Pfffft...as if! The Dark Master rules the orcs. He's a fictional construct, just like the orcs themselves. I mean, you don't see us talking about orcs sitting around rolling dice and telling stories about how they've been screwed over by every possible situation.

We're not like those other trendy games that need to call the gamemaster some weird, colorful, knock-off term related to the game's setting or style, like *Dungeon Master*, or *Storyteller*, or *Pizza Provider*, or *Crack Addict*.

No. The gamemaster is just another player, but he doesn't get an orc. Instead, it is his responsibility to keep play flowing smoothly, and is the one in charge of everything that is *not* the orcs. The gamemaster needs to be able to deal with creating Scenes, coming up with Conflicts (when the players don't provide him with immediate and obvious ones), as well as handling the adjudication of the rules, such as they are, particularly if disagreements arise.

However, even though the gamemaster controls all this, he is not the sole individual in charge of "what happens." The players still describe whatever their orc is doing, and the results, win or lose.

## Getting Into The Mood

### OOHH YEAH...

With all that in mind, there are a number of ways to play **Orx**, some towards which it is best suited given its mechanics and subject matter. **Orx** works most strongly when adhering to the elements of a comedy, adventure, or grim tale, or as some mix of two of these three. Note that mixing all three tends to create a very weak product, not unlike most American beers!

Each group must decide on its own what Mood the game will be played in, which determines the story elements the narrative portions of play will develop and express. It is very important that everyone in the group be committed to that Mood in play, or the game just isn't going to work. Imagine trying to experience a game of high-action and heroic-adventure while your buddy is constantly cracking crude jokes and having his orc kick nice old ladies; there is not much chance the experience will be rewarding or fulfilling.

I'm sure you'll also note that **Orx** assumes the default Mood of Comedy. That said, on to the Moods!

